



By 1stLt Sarah Leming, MALS-16

Three days before Christmas, two Marines from 2d Transportation Support Battalion, 2d FSSG in Camp Lejeune were headed home for the holidays. A lance corporal was going to visit his mother, and I planned to visit my inlaws—both in Tennessee. Neither one of us made it to our destination, but I survived the night.

That morning, 2d TSB Marines had attended safety briefs before being secured early to facilitate their holiday travel. The lance corporal started his long drive across North Carolina, towards Tennessee with only thoughts of home to keep him company. My husband and I, on the other hand, planned to fly to Nashville.

At 5 p.m., we packed the car, making sure our 3-month-old son was snug in his carseat, and set out for Wilmington International Airport, about an hour away

down Route 17. This is a two-lane highway, with only a few intersections. One of these intersections, however, nearly changed my life forever.

My husband was at the wheel when we approached a green light. A split second later, we collided with a red, Toyota pickup, and time seemed to slow down. It was like we were floating as the airbags deployed and the car filled with a mixture of smoke and powder. I watched my son in his carseat fly up, hit the back of the seat, and come back down. The car finally stopped, I grabbed my son and got out. My husband rushed us to the curb, where we stood waiting for emergency-response teams. They took us to a hospital, where my husband and I learned our only injuries were bruises from the shoulderstraps of our seat belts. Our son was

unscathed. The police report said the man driving the truck had a BAC of .24, which is three times the legal limit in North Carolina.

While we were in the hospital, the lance corporal continued driving toward Tennessee until tragedy struck. Police think he may have fallen asleep, woke up, and overcompensated in returning to his lane. In any event, he collided with another vehicle or the guardrail, was thrown from his vehicle (he wasn't wearing his seat belt), and died under the wheels of an oncoming tractor-trailer and another car.

These stories are real, and similar ones happen every day. When fate deals a bad hand, your only hope of protection is to have planned properly. This planning includes buckling up, ensuring your tires are in good condition, and installing that carseat properly. You'll never know if you'll be lucky enough to beat the odds. Through careful preparation and some luck, my family is intact, and I *always* buckle up. Would a seat belt have saved the lance corporal's life? No one knows for sure, but it's certain his chances would have been better. It's not worth the gamble, so buckle up. 🚗

